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Protest

Alexandria Abel

Sacred Heart University, alikey410@gmail.com

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Introduction

Protest is a method used to oppose power or enact change. It is a multifaceted idea in that the type of protest used depends directly on the attainability of the goal. I will discuss the properties of protest and then show how individuals in *Enrique's Journey* and *Dorothy Days Loaves and Fishes* approach the act of protesting differently based on the actuality of the goals to be accomplished.

Protest as Agent of Change

One possibility of protest is protest rooted in the recognition of an unjust situation. Protest can be the action of one individual or several individuals who decide to take matters into their own hands and work for a change. Protest can be motivated by a series of different beliefs. The desire to engage in a protest can be rooted in violations of human dignity, resistance to government or for financial reasons. For example, if an individual believes in changing government policy one may take action to enforce change in order to improve societal conditions. When an individual makes a useful change in government policy, societal conditions improve. These individuals protest to enact change. When the government does not take action it opens up the opportunity for individuals who feel compelled by the state of their society to act. Regardless of the reasons for protest, when change needs to happen these individuals are willing to fight for it.

Protests can be performed in many different ways depending on how realistic the goal is. For a societal problem that is generally recognized and seen as a wide spread issue, the protest will likely be more of a communal act. We see this kind of protest in *Enrique's Journey*.

However, if the problem is not a well-known or is somewhat of a new idea, the protest may come across as more of a countercultural movement. We see in *Loaves and Fishes* this counter cultural movement. An individual starting the new protest may be motivated by his or her own ideas which may not yet be widely accepted.

Protests as a Statement for Change

In *Enrique's Journey*, the author Sonia Nazario tells the story of a boy's dangerous journey to find his mother. She discovers the horrible conditions of people living in Honduras. Most individuals are in search of a better life for their families. However, they cannot afford to have a better life. Poverty and low wages are significant problems for individuals living in Honduras. They do not have the financial or governmental support to pick up and leave Honduras to start a new life in America. Many poor families do not have the opportunity to send their children to school to receive a proper education and job. Thus, the cycle of poverty continues.

Certain individuals in Honduras take matters into their own hands. Particular Hondurans almost unintentionally, protest against their government through the large migrations of people. In this case, the large numbers of migrants traveling from Honduras to America act as a statement to the government that something is wrong. The citizens of Honduras are unhappy and are willing to take a chance to find a better life by fleeing Honduras. Migrants to America are often looking to improve their current situations. By fleeing their country in hopes to start a better life in America, they take part in a communal protest against the Honduran government. They are indicating that they need change.

Protests in the Form of Communal Action

Sonia Nazario explains that Mexican government has tried to stop these immigrants traveling from Honduras to America by means of various police and checkpoints. Trains for travel were often guarded by immigration officials and police officers to ensure no one was leaving the country illegally to go to America. However, Nazario tells a report of a young Honduran girl who still tried to make the treacherous journey from Honduras to America knowing the risks. During her journey she traveled on a train headed to El Campesino El Mirador. The train was stopped by authorities when many migrants were seen on top of her train. Several migrants jumped off and were ruthlessly chased by police. Nazario describes the scene as, “Townpeople say the officers began to shoot. One bullet hit a Honduran girl, seventeen or eighteen years old, in the arm. She was eight months pregnant” (p. 117). The girl tried to continue to run away but was later beaten by three officers who caught up with her. She was kicked and beaten with their night sticks. Many members of the local community heard the brutal beating themselves and decided to take action.

Fifty local El Campesino El Mirador community members encircled the girl and chanted at the brutal police officers until the police officers ran away. Thus, the townspeople made the decision to take action into their own hands. Residents of this local community marched to city hall and demanded the release of any migrants who were beaten or apprehended during this brutal and unnecessary attack. Some residents shouted “We are human. We should treat people in a human way. It’s okay to send people back. But we shouldn’t shoot them, beat them this way” (p. 119). After this protest against the government, the local news reported that eight police officers were fired because of this incident. The local community gathered to address the problems of Mexican authority’s brutality toward the migrants.

This common case of brutality was a familiar occurrence and witnessed by many people of the community. Many migrants were being harassed. The community decided to form in large numbers and take action. They understood the problem and concluded that action needed to take place. They acted in a communal fashion and formed a group protest. They recognized the unwarranted treatment and police brutality and decided to take action. They continued to take action by marching straight to city hall where they were able to bring awareness to the situation of migrant treatment, and caused eight police officers to lose their job over the incident. The El Campesino El Mirador community showed to the community and government officials that migrants should be treated with respect and dignity. They chose to protest with communal action because of the widespread understanding about the brutal treatment of migrants.

Another example of communal action as a form of protest includes the actions of the Maria Auxilidora Church as discussed by Nazario in *Enrique's Journey*. The Maria Auxilidora Church helped hundreds of migrants. The priest Salamon Lemus states "Hundreds of migrants mill around in the courtyard. They sleep in every nook and cranny of the church" (p.111). For over twenty years the church has worked tirelessly to help fight for the rights of workers, migrants and the poor (p.111). Since the church is located at a train stop for migrants they have seen the brutality migrants have faced from local police and immigration authority. "They have watched police officers haul migrants by the hair or twist their wrists behind their backs, before throwing them into the back of their pickup trucks" (p. 111). They saw migrants beaten, robbed and also watched thirty-two migrants lose their limbs to the train. (p.111). The church of Maria Auxilidora decided to take action. They recognized the unjust actions and brutality of the officials and decided as an organization they needed to take action to stop this unjust brutality. Church members fought for the human dignity of these poor migrants. They organized teams that

would rush to aid a migrant being robbed or abused by police. One church member states, “They aren’t animals. They are human beings, you’d never want to be treated that way” (Page 112). At one point the police invaded the Church that was helping these migrants and continued to arrest and beat several migrants. The priest immediately protested. He stated that the authorities violated the church and wanted the migrants released immediately. The police only let some of the migrants go. The church turned to public protest to help these migrants. They were simply fighting for justice. The church later turned into a sanctuary for migrants where they were fed and able to sleep peacefully.

Through public protest and communal action the individuals of Maria Auxilidora Church found strength in numbers and used their assets as a community to practice public protest. Each individual saw the brutality and violence practiced by the officers as a problem and decided to take action. The goal of the community was to enforce change throughout the community and they accomplished it. The reality of their goal was clear, well supported and well understood which led to the great number of individuals acting in protest and change being accomplished.

Protest as Countercultural

Peter Maurin had many ideas to reform the world we live in especially for the poor and less fortunate. Peter had the idea to create a newspaper with Dorothy Day for clarification of thought about the social problems. He also had the idea of creating houses of hospitality and organizing farming communes to solve social and economic problems of society. He was described by Day as a man who “fancied himself a troubadour of God, going about the public squares and street corners indoctrinating his listeners by a singsong repetition, which certainly caught their attention” (p. 9). Peter strived to not only teach others to love God but to also show

love himself. Peter also practiced voluntary poverty. He owned nothing. He lived day to day living on bread and soup and had next to no material possessions (p.10). He believed that money was not important to enact change but instead people were. If people are willing to work, anything can be done (p.11).

Peter Maurin's Houses of Hospitality were based strictly on the effort of others to maintain the houses with no government assistance. Hospitality houses started with a donated space to start the house which acted as a halfway house. Men worked for the farm to give back and a priest led the house. Maurin's idea was based in a utopian Christian society. However unlike many poor houses that are assisted by some form of government or state, these houses were made strictly with no government assistance. Hospitality houses were a way for the others to take issues of poverty and economic greed into their own hands. Peter had a vision but did not want to rely on the government so he had to act individually to accomplish his goal. Peter described these houses as a way "to give to the rich an opportunity to serve the poor" (p. 29). This formation of hospitality houses also set off a chain reaction. "Students and other group's similar to ours which had already sprung up around the country were able to read their writings in *The Catholic Worker*, to ponder their thought, and to try making the synthesis of 'cult, culture and cultivation'" (p.31).

Peter Maurin's form of thinking was very unique. This idea of hospitality houses, communal farms and no aid from the government was not a common one. Peter was innovative in his idea of hospitality houses. His unique ideas were shared in Dorothy Day's newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*. He improved the lives of so many who could not afford housing or were poor. He is a counter cultural thinker. He viewed society's problems and solutions very differently than others. Peter's main goal was to establish personal responsibility instead of relying on

government aid. He decided to take action himself. He preached his views and shared his stories in hopes to someday gain enough support to create a change in the world. The attainability of Peter's goal to establish complete personal responsibility was somewhat unlikely so therefore he needed to solely rely on himself to change the world. Peter relied heavily on individual action because his views were unfamiliar to many. Peter did bring about some change through his actions. His hospitality houses were being duplicated around the country and he was gaining popularity through the newspaper.

A member of *The Catholic Worker* in *Loaves and Fishes* named Ammon Hennacy is another example of counter cultural thinking. Ammon is described as being "guided by the Sermon on the Mount, he wanted to lead a life of poverty, loving-kindness, and peacefulness" (p. 109). He trusted that the only way to do this was to oppose the government completely. He believed the only way to create better conditions for society was to change and oppose the government. Ammon chose two forms of protest to resist authority peacefully and bring awareness to his option for change. He chose fasting and picketing (p.109). On one particular occasion he was trying to bring awareness to the health of the state and abolish government. On the night before he was going to picket for his cause he fasted on only fruit juices. He paced the street for hours, handing out literature and carrying posters. Many people taunted him but he continued ruthlessly (p.113). He was seen as a counter cultural thinker and not well understood by many.

Since Ammon is somewhat of a countercultural thinker, his ideas are somewhat outrageous and not common. For this reason, Ammon's goal of abolishing government was a fairly unrealistic goal, but this did not stop him. Dorothy Day describes Ammon's view of anarchism to be "really fighting the modern state, and war, which may consider 'the health of the

state’” (p.113). He believes words like “government, authority and law” should not be used (p.113). He opposed the government and brought awareness and attention to the problems at hand. He worked mostly through individual protest because of the unrealistic nature of his goals. Many people did not understand or follow his views so he mostly had to work alone. In this case, it was a lot more difficult to raise awareness and change to his cause. Although Ammon may have not brought about immediate change to what he thought was a better way to rule society, he used protest to take the first steps in acting for a cause.

Conclusion

Protest is a multidimensional kind of action that can be used in many different ways. In enacting change of a common problem, communal action is custom. Many people would likely gather to protest on behalf of a certain idea because it is widely understood. On the other hand, protest may also be practiced as individual action. For an unrealistic goal, an individual may find themselves protesting alone in hopes to gain support for their ideas. Popular goals attract great numbers in protest while countercultural goals do not attract as many people often leaving the protesting to an individual. In this paper I have demonstrated that the form and success of the protests depends directly on how commonly accepted the goal is.